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Census gives San Jose top billing over that other Bay Area city

By Tracey Kaplan
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What's in a name? Plenty, if you're talking about a city like San Jose that has long lived in the shadow of its northern neighbor.

In a move more symbolic than substantive, the U.S. Census Bureau has decided to give San Jose top billing over San Francisco when it refers to the greater metropolitan Bay Area.

It's now the San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland metropolitan area, thankyouverymuch.

San Jose bumped San Francisco out of its spot as the region's largest metropolis in 1990, but census officials didn't change the name until last month. That's because San Jose didn't surpass that other city until later in the 1990s as a jobs center.

``It's about time that they've caught up to the fact that San Jose is the powerhouse of the whole Bay Area," said an elated Ruben Pulido, spokesman for U.S. Rep. Mike Honda, D-Campbell. The region now includes San Benito County, in addition to Santa Cruz County and the nine counties that actually touch the San Francisco Bay.

Despite the economic downturn, San Jose now has more jobs -- 980,000 -- than San Francisco has people -- 764,049. And, of course, San Jose has more people -- 900,443. So when federal officials proposed renaming the greater Bay Area after the 2000 census, apparently no one in the local congressional delegation objected.

But the new nomenclature for the region touched off a verbal duel Friday.

It could just be sour grapes, but San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown appeared to be, well, in denial.

``It will still be known as the San Francisco Bay Area, and the census findings won't change that," said Brown, according to a spokeswoman.

Er, not so fast there, Willie.

There are some good reasons why San Jose is overshadowing San Francisco, according to San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales' office.

``We're big, we're great and we have wonderful neighborhoods," said Jennifer Galliard, a spokeswoman for Gonzales, who was out of town. ``That's why so many *more* people have chosen to live here."

For the time being, the area shorthand isn't expected to change, according to local business groups, economists and marketers. But never say never. Many didn't expect San Jose to ever supersede San Francisco, said William Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution.

``This is going to shock a lot of people because it really is a turnaround," Frey said.

Daniel Fenton, president and CEO of the San Jose Convention & Visitors Bureau, said the name change could ultimately transform the way people refer to urbanized Northern California.

``This is the launching pad for changing the name of the region to the San Jose Bay Area," Fenton said. ``Let's keep our head high and push for that."

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